

WHY I'M ANGRY AT DAVID BROOKS

Posts in this series

... [S]ome people waited anxiously [for the release of the Mueller Report]. Others already knew the result. As a Trump supporter named Donna Kowalczyk told the journalist Ben Bradlee Jr., “I don’t think there’s anything to it. If they find something, they will have made it up.”

To say that she and I approached the question differently would be an understatement. As a professional journalist, I am evidence-based, dispassionate, and fair-minded. I decide after I have the facts, not before. At least, that is how I flatter myself.

But really, am I so different from Ms. Kowalczyk? Or am I merely a member of a different tribe, and as biased and blind to my biases as she or anyone else? And suppose, for argument’s sake, Ms. Kowalczyk is in fact less evidence-based and dispassionate than I: whose way of thinking is more normal and natural? Whose way is more serviceable for most humans in most circumstances?

The answer: not mine.

Rauch, Jonathan. *The Constitution of Knowledge*, Pp. 20-21, fn omitted.

I was outraged by David Brooks’ article in the Atlantic, *How The Bobos Broke America*. In my last two posts I’ve tried to explain why I’m so angry. Of course everyone knows Brooks is a shallow apologist for the dominant class. Of course he dips into books and scholarly papers looking for passages he can twist to support his permanently fixed world view. Of course he

blames liberals for all the damage done by the dominant class. Of course he wants readers to focus on his arguments and ignore his filthy rich patrons behind the curtain. I spent hours working my way through his dribble, reading Rauch, and writing these posts, so at one level it worked.

It's genuinely stupid to blame the creative class for Trumpism, as Brooks does. Most people are happy to enjoy the work done by the creative class, and really don't care what individual members of that class like in the way of coffee or lettuce or music. Just like we don't really care if they like NASCAR and Country Music. Each to his own.

Everybody knows that the only reason anyone cares about these culture war issues is that sickeningly rich right-wing fanatics, opportunistic politicians, and paid media liars pump up hostility about the outrage of the day, hoping that the rage of their little minority coupled with the unthinking votes of long-time Republicans will keep them in power through gamed elections.

I'm occasionally pissed off at the people who fall for that garbage, but it always used to pass, and I certainly wasn't angry at them. That's changed. In writing these posts I realized that I'm genuinely angry at the anti-vaxxers, and at the Trumpists and their armed wing, collectively the Right. That anger boils over onto every Republican who ignores the threat the Right poses to our democracy.

At first I was furious at Brooks' intellectual laziness. Rauch carefully describes an Epistemic Regime developed over centuries that dragged us out of ignorance and gave us tools to make our lives vastly better. Brooks calls it a group of people who determine what's true. That's an appalling misrepresentation.

Brooks insinuates that he works under the Epistemic Regime, but no. Brooks is a member of a bias-confirming community, a "... social

affinity [group] where we seek not to test each other's beliefs but to affirm them." Rauch, supra at 114. In fact, he's a confirmer-in-chief, a leader. I knew that, and now I have formal words to describe his despicable intellectual dishonesty rather than obscenities.

I've worked out two justifications for my anger at the Right as a whole.

1. Brooks argues that the creative class makes the Right and the Republicans feel disrespected.

If creative-class types just worked hard and made more money than other people, that might not cause such acute political conflict. What causes psychic crisis are the whiffs of "smarter than" and "more enlightened than" and "more tolerant than" that the creative class gives off.

Brooks is saying that the creative class creates psychic crises leading to political conflict by being different. The creative class has its own tastes in consumer goods, entertainment, and intellectual activities. It has a different moral sense than the Right. He's saying that we in the creative class should not tell the Right about our tastes, maybe even that we shouldn't have them. He says we should never argue with the Right about the thinking or lack of thinking behind our respective moral judgments. We must never try to put our own moral choices into law. He's saying the Right's tastes and morality should be respected, but it's fine for them to hate us for ours. He's saying that we should never use the law to rectify injustice as we see it.

Well, David Brooks, you might accidentally be right about this, but you contributed to it, and it's bullshit. You the rest of your bias-conforming community can just fuck right off.

2. After reading Rauch, I began to see the Right differently. They aren't just worried about living their own way, which somehow is

threatened by my moral sense and the laws I think are necessary to make things better for all of us. Just like David Brooks, the Right rejects Rauch's Epistemic Regime.

It's the usual practice under the Epistemic Regime to insert disclaimers about problems with everything we defend. Not this time. Rejection of our system for accumulating knowledge is dangerous, stupid, and scary. The alternatives offered by the Right are ignorant, absurd, and guaranteed to produce misery for everyone. The people who push those alternatives are ghouls, misfits, nihilists, and power-maddened freaks.

We are constantly admonished that the fault lies with the leaders and mis-leaders, not the great mass of our fellow citizens. We should be nice to the latter, it's not their fault. I could almost accept that when they complained about equal marriage, abortion rights, and the War on Christmas. But now they attack the entire way of thinking that gave us the vaccine for a deadly disease, and then organized to produce vast quantities of the vaccine, safely, in a matter of months.

The Right's rejection of vaccines, for whatever ridiculous reasons, threatens me personally and the people I love. I work hard to be a member of the Tribe of the Epistemic Regime, and I take it personally, I get angry, when the Right Tribe attacks it. More broadly, rejection of the Epistemic Regime is a threat to the continued accumulation of knowledge, which is crucial if our planet and the human race are to survive.

That threat justifies intense anger.